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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PRETORIA 004411

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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [EINV](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SF](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICA LAUNCHES APRM PROCESS

1. (U) This cable is Sensitive But Unclassified. Not for Internet distribution.

2. (U) Summary. President Thabo Mbeki launched South Africa's African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) process on September 28 by calling on his citizens to lead by example in Africa's transformation. Mbeki admitted South Africa's weaknesses in the areas of local government capacity and corruption. He has tapped the Department of Public Service and Administration's Minister Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi to lead the country through the APRM process. Civil society voiced complaints about what they saw as a government-dominated process; however, some of these criticisms have been laid to rest since civil society groups gained 10 out of 15 seats on the APRM Governing Council and more time has been allocated for consultations. South Africa's APRM process is scheduled to be complete by July 2006. End Summary.

Presidential Support

3. (U) President Thabo Mbeki declared his commitment to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) through his attendance at the September 28th launch for South Africa's peer review. He called for South Africans not to forget all the support they received from other Africans during the struggle against apartheid and encouraged them to actively assist the rest of Africa with its political and economic transformation. Mbeki counseled participants that South Africa could not expect the rest of the continent to change without itself conducting a proper review. He warned that the rest of the continent would be watching South Africa with higher expectations than it held for other countries. He encouraged participants to expose South Africa's weaknesses so that the government could remedy them. During South Africa's APRM, for example, Mbeki was "quite certain" that corruption would be raised as would the lack of local government capacity. In the end, Mbeki hoped the process would result in solving problems in a way that could move the country forward.

Leader of the Pack: DPSA

4. (U) Mbeki tapped the South African Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) to lead the APRM process. In her keynote address, DPSA Minister Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi noted that an APRM process would have been inconceivable in South Africa not too long ago, but that now South Africa was a "shining beacon on the global stage." The APRM process was a way to learn how to do things better and to create a "non-racial, non-sexist society." Fraser-Moleketi wanted to ensure the participation of civil society and community groups through provincial conferences, local meetings with ward committees, and an interactive website. In this effort, DPSA intends to employ as many as 2,000 community workers to administer the questionnaire that will serve as the basis for the self-assessment report. Fraser-Moleketi stated that South Africa was ready to answer the tough questions and that the South African Government (SAG) needed a clear vision of what was actually going on in the country so it could do more.

Civil Society: Complaints and Recommendations

5. (SBU) In the run up to the APRM launch, various groups and organizations comprising civil society criticized the SAG for dominating the APRM process and for what they termed non-transparency. They contrasted the South African process with that of the Ghana, whose APRM they thought was led by civil society in a transparent and inclusive way. In response, Mbeki pondered at one point in his address as to whether "we actually have an independent African civil society, because you have civil society organizations funded by the Americans, and the Swedes, and the Danes, and the Japanese and so on, who set agendas." This statement was widely quoted and interpreted by the local press as casting doubt on whether the voice of civil society was South African or foreign. (Comment: While this interpretation may partly reflect what Mbeki was saying, he made the comment in the context of motivating South Africans to take charge of their own agenda, and to be active participants in setting the course for their own future. End Comment.)

16. (U) Laura Kganyago of the National Women's Coalition spoke on behalf of the Economic, Social, and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), an advisory organ of the African Union. Kganyago felt that the APRM's Governing Council should have more representatives from civil society than from government. She also called for publicly-distributed questionnaires to be translated into all eleven official languages, and to make them easily accessible to people in rural areas. She wanted the APRM process to be clearly explained to all citizens through the distribution of a simple manual that could be understood by South Africans possessing little education. Kganyago hoped that the final report would improve living and working conditions in South Africa and eventually lead to making South Africa more attractive to investors.

Governing Council Allays Some Fears

17. (U) Many of the initial complaints made by civil society groups subsided after the timetable for the APRM process was extended to nine months and the Governing Council was expanded to include more civil society members. This allowed participating groups more time for community consultations and better representation on the Governing Council. Concerns remain about loading the Council with five powerful Cabinet members and the way that the questionnaire seems to leads respondents to answer favorably.

18. (U) The Governing Council will consist of five government representatives and ten civil society representatives. The five government members are Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, Trade and Industry Minister Mandisi Mphahla, Justice Minister Bridgette Mabandla, Minister in the Presidency Essop Pahad, and DPSA Minister Fraser-Moleketi (Chairperson). The ten civil society members represent labor, youth, NGOs, and faith-based institutions. They are as follows:

- Mr. Bheki Sibiya, Business Unity South Africa
- Mr. Lukes Matoto, Disabled People South Africa
- Ms. Zanele Twala, South African National NGO Coalition
- Dr. Nomonde Mqhai, South African Youth Council
- Ms. Thabisile Msezani, South African Council of Churches
- Mr. Randall Howard, Congress of South African Trade Unions
- Dr. Mongane Wally Serote, Arts and Culture Sector
- Mr. Master Mahlobogoane, South African National Civic Organization
- Ms. Laura Kganyago, National Women's Coalition
- Mr. Moemedi Kepadisa, National Council of Trade Unions

APRM Stages

19. (U) The formal APRM process will move through the following five stages: (1) preparation of a Country Self-Assessment report and Program of Action based on a public questionnaire -- covering political governance, economic management, corporate governance, and socio-economic development; (2) submission of the Self Assessment and Program of Action to the APRM Secretariat; (3) consultations with the Country Review Team, led by Nigerian Professor Adebayo Adedeji; (4) preparation of the Country Review Team's response to the report; and (5) submission of all reports to the African Peer Review Forum for later public release. An APRM team will return to South Africa at a later date to assess progress on the country's Program of Action.

110. (U) The target date for completion of South Africa's APRM process is July 2006. South Africa's Governing Council must now finalize its national questionnaire and formulate a road map to the finish. In November, the African Peer Review Secretariat will send a Country Support Team, led by Adedeji,

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to assess South Africa's readiness to begin the process. As a follow-up to the launch event, South Africa plans to hold a second public consultative event, which will assist the Governing Council in making progress towards the final report.
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